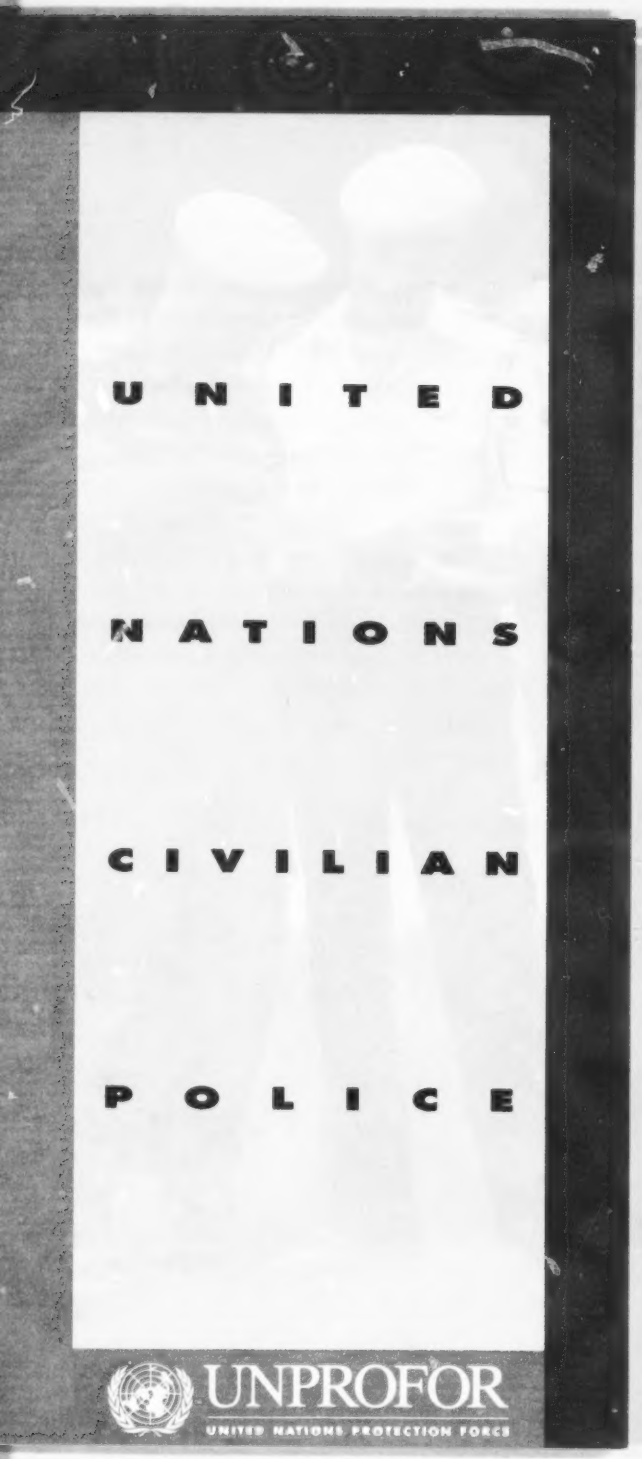
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Arson, robbery, murder, theft, sniper fire, suicide and assaults are crimes local communities face each day in war-torn former Yugoslavia.

The investigation of these crimes by local police forces is carefully monitored by the United Nations civilian police, known as CIVPOL.

CIVPOL comprises more than 600 professional police officers from almost 20 countries operating in the three UN Protected Areas (UNPAs), Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

When the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was deployed in February 1992 it included CIVPOL as an essential component of its mandate.

Rick Kerbyson

Staton Winter

Because lawlessness is a by-product of war, which shatters the basic infrastructure of society, international civilian police are needed to assist UNPROFOR in restoring peace to the region.

One of CIVPOL's main tasks is to monitor the activities of local police forces to ensure that all civilians are treated equally and fairly regardless of nationality or ethnic background.

CIVPOL, which reports to UNPROFOR's Head of Civil Affairs, investigates any complaints that these standards have not been observed and reports any confirmed cases of discrimination or abuse.

To perform its tasks, CIVPOL accompanies the local police on their patrols and during the performance of their duties.

Wherever possible CIVPOL monitors are located at the same station as the local police force and they have full access to all local police premises and facilities.

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It is not CIVPOL's job to maintain public order in its areas of responsibility. That is up to the local police.

Like UN military observers, CIVPOL monitors are unarmed so they are accessible and pose no threat to the people they are trying to help.

"Every CIVPOL station, whose members often include up to 10 nationalities, tries to get to know most of the civilians living in its area of responsibility"

Drawing on years of experience as police officers in their own countries, CIVPOL monitors spend a lot of time investigating the needs and condition of local populations.

Each CIVPOL monitor is posted for up to 12 months in the former Yugoslavia, usually at the same location so he or she can build the trust of the community.

And every CIVPOL station, whose members often include up to 10 nationalities, tries to get to know most of the civilians living in its area of responsibility.

In this way, the humanitarian aspect of CIVPOL's duties plays a major role.

CIVPOL has been very successful in finding out the condition of displaced people and refugees as well as the location of missing relatives, although this is often not always good news because, tragically, the war has claimed so many civilian lives.

But at the same time, CIVPOL is able to help civilians who face food, water and medicine shortages by assisting humanitarian agencies, including the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

John Isaac

CIVPOL at times conducts its own investigations independently of the local police, particularly when there is some suspicion about the results of an initial probe.

Other duties CIVPOL performs include:

- Checking all incoming cargo at Sarajevo and Split airports to ensure it contains only humanitarian aid;
- Assisting in the supervision of security at airports; and
- Monitoring the work of local police in border areas in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

CIVPOL monitors have preparatory training before being posted, which includes learning special negotiating and communication skills.

"CIVPOL monitors have preparatory training before being posted, which includes learning special negotiating and communication skills"

Their job exposes them to many dangers. It is not uncommon for CIVPOL monitors to be threatened at gunpoint by hostile militia.

But with the eventual success of the UNPROFOR mission, the tireless work of CIVPOL monitors will have played an important part in the restoration of peace in the former Yugoslavia.